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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Y'know, I like April Fool's jokes as well as the next guy, but this has gone too far!! This morning I woke up, looked out the window, and saw... SNOW!! I know, they forecast it days in advance. But, it's April for cryin' out loud!! Anyway, the 7-10 inches that was forecast only net us about 3 inches, so I guess I shouldn't feel too badly - but I do! It was just a few days ago that I had the dogs out on the deck with me, grilling a nice porterhouse steak (yes, I share with "the kids"!). Except for an occasional chill in the air, it's been feeling like Spring outside.

I remember when April Fool's jokes were ingenious. Most times now, it's just too easy to recognize a prank on this "day of pranks", and we tend not to fall prey to them. But every once in awhile, someone will getcha! And then there's the April Fool's prank that no one realizes has been played - a useless waste of time, in my mind, but try to tell the self-proclaimed prankster! One of my part time jobs is working at the deli counter of one of the local supermarkets. I worked last night. One of my co-workers took me aside to tell me that he was going to pull a prank on the boss - the reason he was telling me will be explained shortly. Anyway, we have one of those customer ticket thingies - a customer comes to the department, grabs a number ticket, and then waits to hear his number called to place his order. There is a lighted fixture hanging from the ceiling that displays numbers, letting customers know what number is currently being served - an indication of how long one might ponder the wait to be served.

So, the co-worker decides that he's going to "sabotage" the lighted number indicator, by tripping the circuit breaker behind the department in the warehouse area. No light, no ability to keep track of customers being served, or to be served. On a busy day, with lots of customers, that will be a problem!

Now, the reason he told me... The store opens at 7:00 a.m., and I'm scheduled to start work today at 10:00. So, my co-worker figures that when I go in and notice the light not working, I can "fix" it (he gave me the location of the breaker in one of the panels) before it gets too busy in the department. He figured that someone would ascertain the problem and figure it out, but just in case...

So, as I sauntered up the aisle toward the department, I made sure to note whether or not the light was working or not. It was. Now I wondered if someone was going to ask about it, if it "stopped working" last night. No one mentioned a word, and that was the end of it. A prank? Well, yes, but who "appreciated" it?

Oh well, enough about April Fool's Day and potential and actual pranks! Hopefully you made it through the day unscathed, especially not having to deal with snow so late in the season!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 3DS Bad for Your Health?
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Is Your Nintendo 3DS Bad for Your Health?

In less than a week since its launch, the Nintendo 3DS, a handheld gaming console featuring glasses-free 3D technology has been wildly popular. In fact, Nintendo said that first day sales were the highest for any Nintendo hand-held device ever.

Popularity aside, 3D is a divisive technology. Some critics say its just plain uncomfortable, and others go even further to call it a health risk.

Some gamers have complained of headaches and minor discomfort after playing their 3DS. Nintendo responded to tell users to take more breaks when playing with the device.

"As with anything that requires focus, from reading to staring at a computer screen, taking breaks, frequent breaks, is always recommended," Robert Saunders, Nintendo's head of communications, said in a statement. "When viewing any kind of 3D images (TV, movies, etc.), some people might experience minor discomfort. The effects are short term and have no lasting effect, in fact most players can continue after taking a short break."

But is 3D bad for you? When the eyes look at something nearby, they converge to bring the object into focus. By contrast, when eyes focus on something further away, they must refocus in order to converge again. This task has been widely reported to cause discomfort for some people.

"That's probably in my opinion the fundamental challenge of virtual 3D," said Dr. Jim Sheedy, director of the Vision Performance Institute at the College of Optometry at Pacific University. "It requires the visual

system to do a different trick than it does in the real world. Some people are better at it than others."

A 3D image is created through the combination of two different perspectives. But there’s a small percentage of the population can’t even process 3D. Somewhere between four and ten percent of people can’t see 3D, depending on who you ask.

It’s undeniable that 3D is a big trend as far as consumer electronics go. Panasonic launched the first 3DTV a little more than a year ago and several other companies have followed suit, including Samsung, LG, Sony, and others. Most 3D content requires glasses, although other companies, such as Toshiba, are working on glasses-free products, which could alleviate some of the complaints. The Nintendo 3DS is one of the first consumer-ready products to take the technology a step further, eschewing the Buddy Holly-style glasses.

I spent some time playing with the 3DS in the PCMag labs. The 3DS is a cool product and the 3D display has rich graphics and is very near realistic. Admittedly I couldn’t sit and play with the device for hours on end, but I enjoyed playing with it. Nintendo even included a sliding control that lets you turn down the intensity of the 3D screen if it bothers you.

But even if you move your head just slightly, the 3D goes out of focus, which is actually similar to the way the human eye functions. Every time your eye moves, it has to refocus. With 3D, the eyes are focusing and refocusing much more than usual, so its natural that they might feel some strain.

"Viewing in 3D really cannot damage the eyes," Sheedy said. "I can’t see a way how someone is damaging their visual system." So as far as the 3DS goes, can it be uncomfortable? Maybe. But is it a hazard to your health? Probably not.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Death of a Video Gamer

The following article from Video Games, October 1982, pp. 14-15, documents the first known death attributed to playing video games.

Peter Burkowski had not been drinking when he arrived at Friar Tuck’s Game Room in Calumet City, Illinois. He hadn’t been using drugs either. According to the owner of Friar Tuck’s, Peter and a friend walked in about 8:30 p.m. Saturday, April 3, and went straight to the games. Peter was eighteen, likeable, and apparently healthy. An "A" student, he had plans to become a doctor someday. Peter was also good with the games. In fifteen minutes of play, he wrote his initials at least twice in the "Top Ten" on the Berzerk screen. Then, tired of that game, he turned,

took about four steps, dropped his quarter into a second machine, and collapsed. By 9 p.m. Peter was dead. The cause: heart attack.

The next day, one newspaper headline read, "Video Game Death." Was Peter, indeed, a casualty of the games? "Yes and no," says Mark Allen, Lake County's deputy coroner. Though the autopsy found unsuspected scar tissue on Peter's heart that was at least two weeks old, Allen believes, it's possible that the stress of the games triggered the attack in Peter's weakened heart.

"We certainly don't want to scare people away from video games," Allen explains. "Peter could have died in a number of stressful situations. We once had a boy who had a heart attack while studying for an exam. It just happened that he died in front of a video game, but it's also quite interesting."

After Peter's death, camera crews descended upon Friar Tuck's, filming the games (especially Berzerk) and interviewing players. "I don't like this kind of publicity," says the owner, Tom Blankly. "Peter's heart had a time bomb in it that just happened to go off here. I expected it to hurt business, but if anything, business has been up."

Profits aside, it turns out that video game playing is a lot more stressful than most people think. Next time you're in an arcade, take a few moments to watch the other players. Notice the twitches of concentration, the way some players' hands and feet shiver in excitement. Often, they pound the machines as if they were battling real invaders.

More than five years ago, cardiologist Robert S. Eliot, M.D. at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, noticed that same behavior in Pong players. Realizing that video games could be used in the lab to create the same stresses his cardiac patients face outside, he began monitoring the patients while they played the games. His findings (Eliot has charted over 1000 patients) are nothing less than startling. "We have had heart rate increases of 60 beats per minute and blood pressures as high as 220 within one minute of starting a computer game. It happens quite a lot but the patients have no awareness.

According to Dr. Eliot, one out of three people have dramatic physiological reactions to mental stress. While not enough data has been compiled to determine whether video games are dangerous for these people, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that too much stress is connected to heart disease and hypertension. At this point, Dr. Eliot, who is being consulted on the case of Peter Burkowski, has no comment.

In any event, if you play the games to relax after a long day, think again. If you're a cardiac patient, you might want to stay at the bar. In Dr. Eliot's lab, he stops the game when a patient's blood pressure gets too high. Unfortunately, Peter Burkowski was never given this advice.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

April Fools’ Day Noted Online with Spoof Redesigns

The online world got an April Fools’ Day makeover as YouTube rolled out 1911 viral videos and the Huffington Post put up a mock pay wall.

Lighthearted pranks are an annual Web tradition on April Fools’ Day, with jokey redesigns and parody products.

Comedy video website Funny or Die, which last year became "Bieber or Die," turned into "Friday or Die." The site’s home page was taken over by teenage viral video star Rebecca Black, complete with "Behind the Music"-style featurettes on her song "Friday." Escape was futile: Even pressing "back" in one’s browser only added Black’s lyrics to the address bar.

Google, always one of the most ardent April Fools’ Day celebrators, launched "Gmail Motion," which allows users to mime directions to their email. Google also played a trick on typeface fans, claiming that after extensive research, it would on Monday make Comic Sans the default font across all Google products. Search the more beloved "Helvetica" on Google, and results come in the less esteemed Comic Sans.

YouTube remade viral videos like the Annoying Orange and the Keyboard Cat in scratchy black-and-white silent clips, purportedly from 1911. (Keyboard Cat became Flugelhorn Feline.) Hulu took a similar approach, dating their video repository to the Web’s dial-up days of 1996, and fittingly promoting then-contemporary shows like "The X-Files" and "News Radio."

The Huffington Post presented one of the most pointed gags in erecting a fake New York Times-style pay wall, but only to employees of the Times. It follows the Times’ recent, much-watched shift to charging readers for digital subscriptions.

In a blog post, Arianna Huffington outlined the specifics of the pay wall, including that only the first six letters of each word could be read at no charge.

The HuffPost joke hints at a growing feud between the two media outlets. Times executive editor Bill Keller recently wrote a column critical of news aggregators, in which he specifically cited the Huffington Post (recently purchased by AOL).

Eileen Murphy, a spokeswoman for the Times, said the HuffPost spoof was "funny, but it was funny the first time around." Murphy noted that the political science blog The Monkey Cage already did a very similar mock pay wall - in which it said it would charge Times employees for access - on March 20.

"It seems that the HuffPo even aggregates their quips," Murphy said.

There were further media machinations in other April Fools’ jokes, too.

Cable network Animal Planet sent out a joke press release announcing a deal for the famous escaped Bronx Zoo cobra - news that some outlets reported earnestly. Grace Suriel, a spokeswoman for the network, said it

was merely "wishful thinking" if anyone took the release seriously.

Most of the April Fools' pranks were harmless, though. The business-centric social networking hub LinkedIn offered unusual connections in its "people you may know" section, including Groucho Marx and Albert Einstein.

Kodak debuted a "Relationshiffft" app to quickly remove ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends from photos and videos. The consumer review website Yelp announced a new deal: monthly puppy rentals.

The software developer Atlassian launched its own version of the enormously popular mobile game Angry Birds: "Angry Nerds."

Google Gets into April Fool's with 'Gmail Motion'

Google joined in the April Fool's pranks on Friday with the release of a new product called "Gmail Motion" that supposedly lets users send and receive emails using only gestures.

Gmail product manager Paul McDonald, in a deadpan explanatory video, said Gmail Motion uses a "language of movements that replaces type entirely" and ends reliance on "outdated technologies" like the keyboard and mouse.

"Using your computer's camera and a spacial tracking algorithm, Gmail Motion interprets physical movement and turns it into actionable commands," McDonald said. "The movements are designed to be intuitive, ergonomic and easy to do."

In the video, a "Googler" demonstrates how Gmail Motion works, pointing backwards with one thumb, for example, to reply to an email message and using two thumbs to "reply all."

The video also includes an interview with a "Lorraine Klayman," presented as an "environmental movement specialist at Nevada Polytechnic College."

"Gmail Motion will free the regular user from the constraints that modern society and our interfaces with our machines have put on the human body," she says.

A link on Google's home page directs a user to the blog post explaining Gmail Motion, which promises to "turn your email into a true body of work."

Google is renowned for its April Fool's jokes, which over the years have included job applications for positions on the Moon and the revelation that its Internet search rankings are compiled by pigeons.

Europe and U.S. Converging on Internet Privacy

Few topics are more sensitive for Web users, or more likely to raise concerns in the corridors of Facebook or Google, than how to regulate

privacy.

For years the United States and Europe, with around 700 million Internet users between them, have diverged in their approach to policing the Web.

But the two sides are converging in their Web privacy positions, partly through intensive meetings in recent months between regulators from Washington and Brussels.

There are still many specifics to be worked out - final legislative proposals are not expected from the European Union until later this year and the United States in June or July - but officials are confident about steadily narrowing the gap.

"Until recently there was a common belief that our approaches on privacy differed so much that it would be difficult to work together," the EU's justice commissioner, Viviane Reding, said in a recent speech.

"This can no longer be argued."

Experts from both sides gathered again in Brussels last week. Afterwards the U.S. ambassador to the EU, William Kennard, mirrored Reding's thoughts, saying differences between the two sides had been overstated.

"People in Europe thought we were not as concerned as we are about updating our privacy laws," he said, adding that the U.S. has now made its support of stronger privacy rules clear.

The crux of the issue for Europe comes down to delivering strict measures to protect individuals, so that companies must, for example, respect an individual's "right to be forgotten" - ensuring that their data are erased if they so wish.

The United States has tended to prefer giving companies responsibility for policing themselves, with the obligation to sign up to codes of conduct, not to meet specific legislation.

Regulators on both sides say they have moved closer to a common position following U.S. President Barack Obama's endorsement this month of a "privacy bill of rights," which officials hailed as the first time in 40 years that a U.S. administration had backed new baseline privacy protections.

The goal of convergence is two fold: to aim for a level playing field that minimizes "regulatory arbitrage," and to ensure that Web-based companies have clear guidelines, allowing them to grow globally without legislative surprises.

That is particularly important as the Internet becomes an ever larger part of the economy - recent figures from Google indicate that 10 percent of British gross domestic product will be generated from the Web by 2015, for example.

Yet despite the bullish talk from American and European officials, some privacy experts remain concerned about how political rhetoric, such as the EU's "right to be forgotten," will eventually be translated into concrete policies.

Paolo Balboni, executive director of the European Privacy Association, says he is concerned about how the EU will enforce Reding's declaration

this month that all websites targeting EU citizens must adhere to EU laws.

"How will they know if a company is indeed targeting EU citizens?" he asked. "Are they going to oblige end users to identify themselves?"

The merit of the principles will lie in whether they are practically enforceable, he said.

Another open question is how the EU will regulate transparency in Internet privacy.

While the EU wants websites to require user-consent every time their data is used, consent forms tend to be long and difficult to understand, and the EU has remained tight-lipped on what user-consent will look like.

In its effort to narrow gaps, the EU is considering how elements of U.S.-style self-regulation could be integrated into its Internet privacy regime without losing legal rigidity.

While both sides are emphasizing the strides they have made toward convergence, it is clear that differences remain, such as on the EU's right to be forgotten, which clashes with U.S. sensibilities over freedom of information.

And despite all the talk of cooperation, neither side has called for adopting identical policies, suggesting that while the playing field might be leveling, it might not end up flat.

Google Reaches Privacy Settlement with FTC

Google has agreed to adopt a comprehensive privacy program to settle federal charges that it deceived users and violated its own privacy policy when it launched a social networking service called Buzz last year.

The search giant triggered a fierce user backlash when it integrated Buzz into its Gmail email service in February 2010. The service automatically created public circles of friends for users based on their most frequent Gmail contacts. But many users complained that they didn't want all their email contacts - which could include ex-spouses, doctors, employers and recruiters - to become part of a social network for anyone to see.

The settlement announced Wednesday with the Federal Trade Commission requires Google to study both its existing services and any new services it launches to determine if they pose risks to user privacy - and develop policies to address those risks if they do.

The settlement mandates independent audits to oversee and verify Google's privacy program every other year for the next 20 years. The settlement also requires Google to obtain user consent before sharing consumer information with third parties if it alters a service to use the data in a way that would violate its existing privacy policy.

The FTC charged that Google had violated its own privacy policy by taking personal information provided for Gmail and integrating it into Buzz without permission, even though it had promised to obtain consent before using information "in a manner different than the purpose for

which it was collected."

"When companies make privacy pledges, they need to honor them," FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz said in a statement.

The FTC complaint outlined a number of problems with Buzz. Those included ineffective options to let users decline to participate in the service, confusing and hard-to-find controls to let users limit sharing of their email contacts, and inadequate notice of exactly what the service did.

After receiving thousands of complaints, Google responded by tweaking the service to make it easier for users to hide their lists of contacts and block specific people from following their Buzz updates, including links, posts, photos and videos. In addition, the company agreed late last year to give about $8.5 million to Internet privacy and policy organizations to settle a class-action lawsuit filed by Gmail users over Buzz.

Jessica Rich, deputy director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, said the agency hopes that Wednesday's settlement will help set privacy standards for companies across the Internet ecosystem - not just Google.

The Electronic Privacy Information Center, a privacy watchdog group that filed the FTC complaint about Google Buzz that led to Wednesday's settlement, echoed that point. "For Internet users, the FTC decision should lead to higher privacy standards and better protection for personal data," EPIC President Marc Rotenberg said in a statement.

For its part, Google said in a blog post that it hopes the FTC settlement puts the issue behind it and apologized for its missteps with Buzz.

"We try to be clear about what data we collect and how we use it - and to give people real control over the information they share with us," the blog post said. "That said, we don't always get everything right. The launch of Google Buzz fell short of our usual standards for transparency and user control - letting our users and Google down."

Google has already stepped up its efforts to improve its privacy policies and practices following last year's disclosure that it had inadvertently sucked up fragments of e-mails, Web surfing behavior and other online activities over public Wi-Fi networks in more than 30 countries while photographing neighborhoods for its "Street View" mapping feature. Google said it discovered the problem after an inquiry by German regulators.

The FTC's rebuke is the latest blow that the government has dealt to Google. Last week, a federal judge rejected a proposed legal settlement that would have given Google the digital rights to millions of out-of-print books after determining that the agreement would have violated U.S. copyright laws and given Google's already-dominant search engine an unfair advantage over its rivals.

Google is hoping to avoid another setback as it tries to persuade the Justice Department to approve its proposed $700 million acquisition of online air fare tracker ITA Software. The Justice Department has spent the past eight months examining whether the deal would allow Google to use its search engine to highlight its travel recommendations over other

services and withhold the latest technology from rivals who already license ITA Software’s products. Lawyers familiar with antitrust reviews expect the Justice Department to decide whether to challenge the acquisition or approve it, possibly with strings attached, within the next month.

Microsoft Files EU Competition Complaint Against Google

Microsoft Corp stepped up its rivalry with Google Inc with a formal complaint to EU antitrust regulators, claiming Google systematically thwarts Internet search competition.

It is the first time Microsoft - itself the target of anticompetition action in the United States and Europe - has filed a complaint with regulators over competition issues.

In its complaint on Thursday, Microsoft claims Google engages in a "pattern of actions" that unfairly impede competition.

Google controls more than 90 percent of the Internet search advertising market in Europe, well ahead of Microsoft’s Bing, which is struggling to make inroads into Google’s market share.

Google is already under investigation by the European Commission after complaints from three small firms, one of them owned by Microsoft.

Google did not seek to counter Microsoft’s claims publicly, but indicated it was not overly concerned by the complaint.

"We’re not surprised that Microsoft has done this, since one of their subsidiaries was one of the original complainants," Google spokesman Al Verney said.

"For our part, we continue to discuss the case with the European Commission and we’re happy to explain to anyone how our business works."

The European Commission said it would review Microsoft’s allegations.

"The Commission takes note of the complaint and, as is the procedure, will inform Google and will ask for its views on it. No further information will be given," EU Commission spokeswoman Amelia Torres said in an emailed statement.

Microsoft’s complaint will raise the profile of the Commission’s ongoing investigation into Google, said Christopher Thomas, a partner at law firm Hogan Lovells.

"Microsoft becoming a formal complainant does make a difference. Those other three companies are of a certain size and are not anything like Microsoft with its resources and determination," he said.

The new allegations could stall any attempt by Google to settle with the EU watchdog, said Thomas Vinje, global head of antitrust practice at Clifford Chance, who led a coalition that took on Microsoft resulting in EU fines for the software group.

"The filing of this complaint will throw a wrench into Google’s efforts

to reach a settlement with the Commission with regard to the competition concerns that have been raised against it," Vinje said.

"Even the requisite preliminary review of such a complaint would seem likely to delay any potential settlement by at least six months."

A source familiar with the case told Reuters last month that Google and the Commission were interested in resolving the issue but there were no concrete proposals on the table.

Microsoft said it felt it was time to challenge Google on legal grounds directly. Last year the company publicly encouraged companies to question Google’s practices.

"As troubling as the situation is in the United States, it is worse in Europe," said Brad Smith, Microsoft’s top lawyer, on a blog on the company’s website.

"That is why our filing today focuses on a pattern of actions that Google has taken to entrench its dominance in the markets for online search and search advertising to the detriment of European consumers."

Specifically, the complaint charges that Google hurts competition by "walling off" content on its YouTube site, so other search engines can’t display accurate results; by making it difficult for Microsoft’s mobile phone software to show videos from YouTube; by blocking access to content owned by book publishers which Google has copied and stored; by not allowing advertisers to use their own data about customers garnered from Google on other sites, such as those owned by Microsoft; by blocking websites from using competing "search boxes"; and by making it expensive for potential competitors to Google to advertise online.

"We readily appreciate that Google should continue to have the freedom to innovate. But it shouldn’t be permitted to pursue practices that restrict others from innovating and offering competitive alternatives," said Microsoft’s Smith in his blog.

"That’s what it’s doing now. And that’s what we hope European officials will assess and ultimately decide to stop."

Microsoft has been fined a total 1.68 billion euros by the Commission for antitrust infringements in Europe.

The State of ’Do Not Track’ on the Internet

Users concerned with online privacy have been struggling for years to come up with a solution to being tracked on the Web. Such users either want to avoid irritating, targeted ads based on browsing history or are concerned about businesses having too much access to our personal information.

Historically, each new workaround to escape tracking online - such as deleting cookies or enabling private browsing modes - is met with new and more effective forms of tracking, such as the much-harder-to-delete flash cookies. The situation may be changing, however, with a new standard that has been making some significant headway in the past few months.

The Do Not Track standard, created by researchers at Stanford University, is a simple solution that has found its way into new browsers - Mozilla Firefox 4 and Microsoft Internet Explorer 9. The promise of Do Not Track is the hope that users could opt out from all online tracking with one click. The concept has been under discussion in Congress and by the Federal Trade Commission.

By checking a box in Firefox's preferences, Do Not Track adds a message to your http: headers confirming that you don't want to be tracked. These headers are already sent with each request for information you make to any site, thus ensuring that any site that tracks you gets the message. The hope is that Do Not Track will let users quickly and easily opt out of all online tracking at once, instead of forcing them to find solutions for each type of tracking individually.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Do Not Track's current flaw is also what makes it so easy to use. Once you've flagged yourself as unwilling to be tracked, it is up to individual Websites to honor your request, and that creates quite a few problems. Hardly any site is complying with the Do Not Track requests - but new federal legislation proposed in Congress in the wake of the FTC's call for a Do Not Track system promises to change all that. However, predictions abound that Do Not Track could have larger, undesirable consequences.

Advertising makes up a significant revenue stream for plenty of sites on the Internet that provide free content (including PCWorld.com), and Do Not Track throws a serious monkey wrench into a certain type of targeted advertising. Exactly how serious a problem Do Not Track could cause depends on who you ask: Industry trade groups are very critical of Do Not Track legislation, and you'll find no shortage of doomsday scenarios suggesting that the passage of this type of legislation will destroy the advertising revenue that funds most free content online and put an end to the Internet as we know it.

The idea is that - without the financial support provided by targeted advertisements - ad-supported sites will no longer be able to sustain themselves, and that the buffet of free content that has been available to users online will therefore disappear.

While Do Not Track is likely to have some economic consequences, these predictions seem seriously overblown. Jonathan Mayer of Stanford Law School's Center for Internet and Society has suggested that Do Not Track's effect on advertising will likely be far smaller than predicted. The behavioral advertising that the Do Not Track law would affect constitutes only about 4 percent of advertising online, according to Mayer - which makes the odds rather low that the content you like to read online would be targeted. In addition, if a site really depended on such behavioral advertising for a large proportion of its revenue, it would be relatively simple for the site to request, or even require, users to allow tracking before they entered the site.

Online tracking is an important tool for advertisers, but it's hardly the only one. Rainey Reitman, Activism Director for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, thinks Do Not Track might let users who are concerned with privacy but who want to support advertising-based sites have it both ways. "The way things are today, the only reasonable method a consumer has to protect her online privacy is to block most of the advertisements on the Internet," Reitman says. "Do Not Track offers a way for users to protect their privacy in a meaningful way without just blocking all advertisements."

A second, less hyped concern with Do Not Track legislation is that we might be targeting the wrong people. As PCWorld.com blogger Jared Newman noted in "Do-Not-Track in Chrome and Firefox: Different Approaches, Same Fatal Flaw," Do Not Track, even with legislation in place, affects only those sites that play by the rules. Users could end up punishing sites like Google that traffic solely in comparatively harmless advertising, while giving free rein to sites that have fewer scruples about using your online information.

This is a real concern with systems where compliance by trackers is voluntary. But it's also important to remember that Do Not Track doesn't exist in a vacuum. Microsoft's IE 9 offers a tracking protection list, that lets users manually exclude content from suspicious sites and actively excludes those sites that don't play by the rules.

It's also important to remember that Do Not Track isn't an all or nothing solution. If you want to support more reputable sites that still engage in tracking, the standard lets users manually allow some sites to track them. So, if you feel that a site like Amazon or Google actually provides value to you when it tracks, you can let it do so without losing your protection against other sites.

If we get national Do Not Track legislation, what changes are end users likely to experience? The EFF's Reitman says that most users probably won't notice much at first. "What you have to remember is that Web tracking as we know it today is insidious in large part because it's invisible. [...] So, just as the problem is in itself hard to spot, the solution will be subtle - most people who enable Do Not Track won't notice a huge difference in their online reading experience."

Do Not Track is far from a perfect solution to online privacy, but it's an important step in the right direction for concerned Web users. When combined with other solutions - like tracking protection lists - it promises to help protect your privacy without seriously affecting your browsing online.

Millions of Sites Hit with Mass-Injection Cyberattack

Hundreds of thousands - and possibly millions - of websites have been hit with a cyberattack that some are calling "one of the biggest mass-injection attacks we've ever seen."

The attack was discovered on March 29 by security firm WebSense, and the injected domain was called lizamoon.com - thus, the name of the mass-injection is "LizaMoon." According to WebSense, LizaMoon uses SQL Injection to add malicious script to compromised sites. While the first injected domain was lizamoon.com, additional URLs have since been injected in the attack.

The method of using an injected script redirects users to a rogue AV site, which tries to get people to install a fake anti-virus program called Windows Stability Center.

When WebSecurity discovered the attack on March 29, 28,000 URLs had been compromised. The number quickly grew to 226,000, including many iTunes URLs (though the malicious code is neutralized by Apple).

"The good thing is that iTunes encodes the script tags, which means that the script doesn’t execute on the user’s computer," WebSense security blogger Patrik Runald wrote on Tuesday, "So good job, Apple."

The attack continues to rampage across the Internet, and currently doesn’t show any signs of slowing down. So don’t install any web-based anti-virus software that claims your computer is full of bugs.

Snafus Forced Twitter Data Center Move

An ambitious plan to prevent "Fail Whales," the cartoon icon that greets frustrated Twitter users during network outages, has turned into a fail whale of its own.

A new, custom-built facility in Utah meant to house computers that power the popular messaging service by the end of 2010 has been plagued with everything from leaky roofs to insufficient power capacity, people familiar with the plans told Reuters.

The botched move threatened new product development and forced Twitter - whose user accounts have burgeoned to 200 million in just five years - to seek another location despite committing significant investment to the facility.

The data center move reflects growing pains faced by red hot tech start-ups as they aim to justify soaring valuations and transform into reliable channels for advertising and commerce.

Twitter said last month its data center had moved to a new home at an undisclosed location - a feat that industry insiders say is impressive by any measure.

People familiar with the matter said the move was to an existing Sacramento facility more than 600 miles away, owned by co-location company Raging Wire, rather than into the custom-built data center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Twitter had signed a $24 million, 4-year minimum commitment lease with C7 Data Centers which was building the Utah center. It was not immediately clear how much, if any, of the fees would be returned or if it planned to pay out the full term of the contract.

Those plans "spiraled out of control," one source said. "They were in over their heads and they did not recognize that until far too late."

Twitter declined to comment about its data centers or finances. Twitter Vice President of Engineering Michael Abbott said the company has done more to upgrade its infrastructure in the last six months than it did in the previous 4.5 years.

"Twitter now has the team and infrastructure in place to capitalize on the tremendous interest in Twitter and continue our record growth," Abbott said in an email.

Large Internet companies such as Google Inc and Yahoo spend anywhere from $50 million to $2.5 billion to construct and equip such data

centers, according to Forrester Research analyst James Staten.

Last month Twitter hired eBay's Mazen Rawashdeh as vice president of operations - a job that sources say didn't exist at Twitter in July 2010 when it announced plans to move its operations infrastructure.

For Twitter, which had been renting servers from hosting provider NTT America for the past several years, moving into its own data center marked a significant milestone.

Within a couple of months of Twitter's July announcement though, it was quietly moving many of its servers out of Salt Lake City and instead shipping all new gear from Sacramento, where server capacity and space was initially very tight.

Twitter concluded that the Utah facility failed to meet its needs, these sources said. The center initially lacked key features such as a second fiber network connection, and less than half of the electricity was actually available.

The roof leaked water onto the top of Twitter's server cabinets with every rain, forcing staffers to move equipment out of harm's way, sources said.

C7 President Wes Swenson declined to confirm Twitter as a customer but defended his company's work at the center. He said 5 megawatts of power were available from Day One and the building had a brand new roof once construction was over in October.

"We experience less than 1 percent churn in our customer base," Swenson said in an interview. "But sometimes we deal with companies that are not very sophisticated; often times a lot of customers that have never owned their own equipment may go through a learning curve."

Twitter's change of plans to move its data center to Sacramento affected product plans as management enforced a several month moratorium on launching new major features.

"Minor stuff was OK," said the person familiar with the matter, but "if you developed a new feature which needed 20 servers, you just weren't going to get the 20 servers."

For now, Twitter is using the remaining servers for limited roles, such as providing analytics functions for its service.

"Nobody wants to put any part of the site that's mission critical in Salt Lake City," said another source familiar with the matter. "That would be a huge battle royale inside the company if they were told they had to."

Global Spam Levels Down a Third After Rustock Botnet's Demise

Global spam levels declined by a third after the demise of the Rustock botnet, according to data from Symantec.

Global spam volumes fell by 33.6 percent between March 15 and 17 after Rustock went down, according to Symantec's March 2011 MessageLabs

Intelligence Report.

Reports of Rustock’s inactivity first emerged in mid-March, but few experts had any explanation for the outage. Microsoft later said that it took down the Rustock botnet with the help of anti-malware company FireEye, the University of Washington, and pharmaceutical firm Pfizer.

"In the days following the botnet takedown on March 16, spam accounted for approximately 33 billion emails per day, compared with an average of 52 billion per day in the previous week," Symantec found.

It’s typical of botnets to have periods of relative inactivity. Rustock, which had a brief pause in activity at the beginning of the year, is no exception. It recovered from the previous outage, and was sending out nearly 14 billion spam emails every day at the beginning of March. At its peak in 2010, Rustock was responsible for almost half of global spam. However, according to Symantec, Rustock isn’t likely to be resurrected this time.

"It remains to be seen whether the criminals behind Rustock will be able to recover from this coordinated effort against what has become one of the most technically sophisticated botnets in recent years," Symantec said in its report. "Rustock has been a significant part of the botnet and malware landscape since January 2006, much longer than any of its contemporaries."

However, it’s usually the case that when one spam source is taken out, another makes up for its absence. Bagle has now claimed the title as the largest purveyor of spam - a title once held by Rustock. Symantec said Bagle is now sending out around 8 million spam emails every day. It’s likely Bagle doesn’t operate out of as many bots as Rustock, but Symantec noted that "its output has been more consistent," and its spam levels are higher than they have been since 2009.

Aren t We All Suffering From ’Facebook Depression?’

With teens using social media more than ever, there’s no shortage of doom and gloom about what the internet is doing to children. The latest threat being bandied about is "Facebook Depression," in which the constant barrage of smiling, happy friend updates amplifies a teen’s feelings of inadequacy.

In all likelihood however, the dangers are overhyped. Facebook Depression is a real risk suggested by the American Academy of Pediatrics but it’s just one risk in a document that is generally fairly positive about teen use of sites like Facebook. Additionally, Researchers are still unclear if this is a standalone condition or a simple online extension for teens who are already feeling depressed.

So is this really a new problem, or even one that’s unique to teens? Instead of some unique form of depression this sounds more like a natural extension of the Facebook envy we’ve all felt from time to time. It’s a fairly common experience to kick ourselves when we see friends out at a cool party we couldn’t make it to or when someone makes a status update about their great new job. The grass is always greener and social media just gives us more chances to see the other side.

There are real dangers for kids using the internet, but this hand-wringing just distracts from them. The AAP suggests that social media does present dangerous situations for teens, such as Cyber-bullying, that can have real consequences - but they also suggest that there are real advantages for teens using social media.

The real solution here isn't to tout Facebook as some imaginary boogeyman causing depression in teens but to talk to kids about their time online. That's not just my opinion - it's the suggestion of the AAP itself, and it's the best way to make sure teens are using Facebook as a way to build healthy social relationships.

Cybersquatting Disputes Grow in 2010

The number of challenges for cybersquatting - the misleading use of trademarks for Internet domain names - rose by 28 percent last year, the World Intellectual Property Organisation said Thursday.

Some 2,696 cases were filed by trademark holders from 57 countries, including major companies such as Toyota, Bank of America, Apple and Pfizer, over the use of their brands on internet address names, said WIPO.

The Geneva-based agency arbitrates cybersquatting disputes. Most of them related to the retail trade, banking, pharmaceuticals, IT and fashion industries.

WIPO Director General Francis Gurry described it as "a significant level of increase, 16 percent higher than the previous lead year in 2008."

But he had no explanation for the growth, apart from the constant increase in overall domain name registrations on the Internet.

Rare Sealed Twentieth Anniversary Macintosh Appears on Ebay

A rare, never-used and still-in-box Twentieth Anniversary Macintosh, designed by present-day Apple design head Jonathan Ive, has turned up on Ebay for auction. The unit is one of the 11,601 machines sold to customers outside Apple. The accessories and keyboard boxes have been opened for inspection, but all components are still in their original packaging.

Originally introduced in 1997 at a cost of $7,500, the computer exemplified the concepts and philosophy that would dominate Apple's future design aesthetic under returning CEO Steve Jobs. There is considerable emphasis on the unusually-vertically-oriented, thin all-in-one design, as well as a vertically-mounted optical drive, an exceptionally high-quality sound system, a detachable trackpad rather than a mouse, high-quality and luxurious fit and finish and an active-maxtrix LCD screen, the best of its kind at the time.

The industrial design won raves even as consumers booed the price, which soon dropped to about half its original listing and then eventually to

under $2,000 before ending the limited production run. While the look and sound was exceptional for the time, the internals were mostly standard, off-the-shelf parts that represented little if any real advancement over cheaper desktop Macs, and was aimed mainly at executive and wealthy customers. Quite a few units suffered from audio buzzing until a fix was finally devised, about a year after release.

The TAM, as it has come to be called, cannot be upgraded to run OS X and can only natively go as high as Mac OS 9.1, but many are still in use, most thanks to later G3 upgrade options made by third-party companies. The unit on auction's only indication of the passage of nearly 20 years time is that the original batteries have expanded (but are not leaking, according to the owner). The unit is currently located in Keller, Texas and the auction notes that shipping the unit will run $35 in the US or more overseas.

Although all components and a full set of accessories as part of the package are still in their original containers, the unit is being sold "as-is" since no testing can be done on it. As of early Monday morning, only a couple of dozen people had viewed the auction, and the bidding price (with no minimum set) was $28.13.

Internet Pioneer Paul Baran Passes Away

US scientist Paul Baran, whose work in the 1960s helped pave the way for the internet, has died aged 84.

Mr Baran thought up the idea of making communication networks resilient to attack or traffic surges by splitting the data sent over them into chunks.

His pioneering work was carried out in connection with Cold War military research.

It would later form the basis of the academic network Arpanet which eventually led to the internet.

Mr Baran first put forward the idea of slicing data into "message blocks" and using a distributed system of nodes to pass them on when working at the Rand Corporation in the mid-1960s.

In his initial conception, Mr Baran said the system would operate by what he called "hot-potato routing".

The work was done as part of a project to keep telecommunications networks operating even if a large part of them was knocked out by a first strike nuclear attack.

The system would be better able to withstand an attack because it lacked a central hub through which all data or messages passed.

This work found new relevance during the early days of the Arpanet, a network designed to aid US scientists communicate and which laid the foundations of the modern-day internet.

Contributions from British scientist Donald Davies led to Mr Baran's ideas being adapted into a technology known as packet switching. This

cuts data up into small chunks that are then despatched around the network.

"Paul wasn’t afraid to go in directions counter to what everyone else thought was the right or only thing to do," Vinton Cerf, one of the fathers of the internet and a longtime friend of Baran, told the New York Times.

Mr Baran died at home in Palo Alto, California from complications caused by lung cancer.

"He was a man of infinite patience," said his son David Baran.

He added that his father had recently shown him a paper written in 1966 which speculated about what people would do with the telecommunication networks in the future.

"It spelled out this idea that by the year 2000 that people would be using online networks for shopping and news," he said. "It was an absolute lunatic fringe idea."

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